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To: MBTA Board of Directors

From: Ryan D. Coholan, Chief Operating Officer Initial

Date: March 20, 2026

Subject: Amending and Updating Bus Network Redesign Service Plan

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Executive Summary:

Following the 2022 Bus Network Redesign, the MBTA began implementing the Better Bus Network, starting in 2024. Thanks to the Healey-Driscoll Administration's investment in the MBTA's Bus Operations workforce, we have been growing service and ridership, creating Frequent Routes, and building supporting infrastructure. Of note, this Spring, we will have achieved 101% of our pre-pandemic bus service levels. Public reaction to implemented changes thus far has been positive. We have always intended the Better Bus Network to be a living, breathing plan, responsive to community feedback and changing operating conditions. This is important, as we believe that the "stagnation" that occurred over 30 years of the same bus service only fueled the demand to try something different.

During implementation, we have been making minor changes to the service plan, but so far none of these have substantially altered the overall plan. In collaboration with community partners, local municipalities and advocacy groups we have identified several route proposals that are significant enough to warrant Board approval, because they meet one or more thresholds in our existing Service and Fare Change Equity Policy:

- Change of at least 10% in Revenue Vehicle Hours (RVH per week by mode)
- Change of at least 25% of RVHs per week by route
- Change of at least 0.30% of the population covered by the entire network according to the base coverage standard established by the Service Delivery Policy

Through this memo, I would like to announce our plan to update and amend the 2022 Bus service plan. This amendment is not a rethinking of the overall plan or its goals; we are focused on changes to specific routes representing approximately 2% of the MBTA's bus service: Over the next several months we will initiate a public process to hear and consider public comment, incorporate public feedback, and analyze any change for disparate impact or disproportionate burden under Title VI.

The goals of the Better Bus Network remain unchanged: growing service, simple frequent routes, equity, and more service to busy neighborhoods and destinations where riders need bus the most.

The Board of Directors must approve any Major Service Change before we make any changes. We anticipate returning to the Board for formal approval later this year.

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Background

Implementation of the Better Bus Network began in 2024; since then, we have been expanding bus service in line with the Bus Network Redesign adopted by the Board in 2022.

The Redesign:

- Is the planning study behind the Better Bus Network, after years of public consultation and over 20,000 public comments
- Calls for 25% increase in bus service over pre-pandemic levels
- Updates our bus network to reflect changes in the Boston area in the last 20 years, and bring 275,000 more residents near Frequent service.

As of early 2026, progress is in full swing:

- 21 Frequent Bus Routes now run every 15 minutes or better, all day every day (from 15 routes in 2022, with 30 as the end-goal)
- We have simplified or removed 35% of confusing variant routes
- 1,300 bus stops now feature new, accessible larger signs
- We are building new stops, changing intersections and streets for better Bus Operations

Proposal

We will begin a public process to amend the 2022 Better Bus Network plan, according to the following schedule and initial agenda. In response to feedback from the communities we work with, the riding public, and more, we have proposed changes to around a dozen routes. We will begin the Amendment process with the following routes, but we will also be open to feedback on other routes and topics:

- Improving Boston Avenue in Medford (Routes 94, 80, possibly implicating the 350, 67, 96)
- Extend Route 426 to Jack Satter House
- Serve A Street in South Boston
- Retain service to Point Shirley, Winthrop
- Retain Route 44 service to Ruggles
- Changes to operating hours and days on Route 18, 43, 85, 504, 202
- Restore Route 465 to Danvers Square

We expect the package of service changes will exceed the MBTA's definition of a Major Service Change[1], which will require a Title VI Equity Analysis, formal Public Outreach, and a Board vote. We will follow the MBTA's Public Participation Plan and plan the following (dates approximate):

[1] This definition of a major service change is included in the MBTA's Service and Fare Change Equity Policy, which is FTA-mandated, signed by the General Manager, and approved by the Board of Directors.

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Milestone	Date (approximate)
Board Announcement (via consent agenda)	March 26, 2026
Release Service Change Proposal to Public	May 2026
Public Comment Period	May-July 2026
Meetings with Stakeholders	*throughout*
Staff Revise and Finalize Service Recommendations	Summer-Fall 2026
Title VI Service Equity Analysis	Fall 2026
Board Vote – Approve Major Service Change	Late 2026
Revise and Restate Better Bus Network plan	Late 2026
Implement and Launch Service	Roll into BNR implementation

Public Outreach Process

We will include the following elements in our public process:

- Formal public meetings, including in-person and virtual
- Consolidated public survey – administered online, on paper, and in person
- Meetings with community groups, elected officials, and more on specific routes or neighborhoods
- Materials translated into multiple languages following our Language Assistance Plan

Preliminarily, we will reach out to the following groups and forums for feedback, and we will stand ready to meet on more specific topics in April-June of this year:

- Elected Officials
- Better Bus Project External Task Force Members
- Municipal planning and transportation staff at all impacted cities and towns
- Advocate and other groups, including but not limited to: Chelsea GreenRoots, Transit Is Essential Coalition, Mass. Senior Action, Boston Center for Independent Living, Fenway Forward, Action for Equity, Greater Mattapan Neighborhood Council, Fairmount Indigo Coalition, TransitMatters, A Better City, Conservation Law Foundation, Livable Streets Alliance, T Riders Union, Longwood Collective
- MBTA Advisory Board

Next MBTA Board Touchpoint

We will return to the Board in late 2026 for Approval of our Final service proposal. This will include a summary of what we heard during the public process, a Title VI Service Equity Analysis ensuring that the plan does not generate a disparate impact or disproportionate burden on protected populations on Title VI, and an estimate at the cost and operational implications of the service changes. If the public comment period extends longer than we expect, we will delay our return to the Board accordingly.